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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 03/04/08

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- (1) Difficulties lie ahead for Defense Ministry reform, with confrontation heating up between civilian personnel and uniformed officers

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)

March 4, 2008

About two weeks have passed since a collision occurred between a Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF) Aegis destroyer and a fishing vessel, but the Defense Ministry is still straying off course. Explanations by its senior members have changed again and again, and a lack of cooperation between the ministry and the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) has also been exposed. Particularly, deep-seated mutual distrust between civilian personnel from internal bureaus and uniformed personnel from the Self-Defense Forces' staff offices has been exposed. Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda attended a meeting yesterday of the government's panel on reforming the Defense Ministry, chaired by Tokyo Electric Power Co. advisor, held for the first time after the Aegis collision. In the meeting, Fukuda stressed the need for efforts to prevent recurrence of a similar incident. But difficulties lie ahead for the drastic reform of the ministry.

"An impermissible incident occurred. I would like you to submit a plan to build a new Defense Ministry and a Self-Defense Force (SDF) that the public can truly trust," the prime minister said in a harsh tone at the outset of the meeting, showing the letter he had received from the family of the missing fishermen. The blunders made by the Defense Ministry and the SDF after the incident have made people wonder if they are trying to cover up information on the collision. The prime minister sees this as a problem.

The Defense Ministry had announced that the destroyer spotted the fishing boat "two minutes before" the accident but it later changed it into "12 minutes." It has been learned that Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba called in the navigating officer of the Aegis destroyer to the Defense Ministry and questioned him on the day of

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the accident. But this information was left unveiled for one week. It has yet to be clarified whether the ministry had informed the JCG, which is responsible for the investigation, of Ishiba's questioning of the navigating officer.

Behind the current confusion in the Defense Ministry, many observers see not administrative blunders but the long-lasting antagonism between civilian personnel and uniformed officers. The hostility was also taken up when there were reports on such cases as the leak of classified information on the Aegis system by a MSDF seaman and the bribery scandal involving former Vice Minister Takemasa Moriya.

In internal bureaus, there is the distrust that uniformed personnel might have properly relayed detailed information. In a press conference yesterday, Vice Minister Kohei Masuda again apologized for the delayed announcement of the facts, saying: "There was no persuasive reason." Regarding the ministry's prior notification (about the questioning of the navigating officer) to the JCG, the vice minister explained, based on information from the Maritime Staff Office, that there were call records of 09:05 and 09:06 on the day of the accident. But JCG members have said that they cannot confirm it.

Meanwhile, uniformed personnel are critical of civilian personnel. A former Defense Ministry official said: "Knowledge about the details of weapons and the management of units is needed for the formation of defense plans. But not all civilian officers have much knowledge of such matters."

The series of scandals involving the Defense Ministry have added fuel to the mutual distrust between civilian personnel and uniformed officers. A senior internal bureau member muttered upon hearing the news of a collision between a MSDF escort vessel and a freighter in Vietnam on March 3, "Not again! They have no feeling of tension." On the other hand, a uniformed officer assailed that such scandals as the one involving Moriya could depress the morale of people on the line.

In the meeting yesterday, harsh views were presented. One participant asserted: "The major cause (for the blunder) was a lack of basic policy for moves;" and another said: "There is no consistency in responses to external matters." The defense minister

emphasized: "The system of assisting the minister is now being questioned."

The defense minister has already announced his reform plan calling for integrating civilian personnel and uniformed personnel and then forming groups according to function, such as the buildup and operation of defense capacity, and explanations in the Diet and to the people. Appearing on a TV program yesterday, Ishiba expressed his displeasure at the rivalry between civilian personnel and uniformed personnel, saying: "Will they be able to take proper action in times of emergency?"

Under the defense minister's proposal, however, the organizations would be completely changed. In the ministry, there is no mood for willingly cooperating in implementing the plan. Ishiba said: "Officers should express their views, and those against my proposal should openly say that this or that part is improper." But ministry officials remain unresponsive.

(2) Prime minister orders work for restructuring MOD; Integration of

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civilian and uniformed groups in focus

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Excerpts)  
March 4, 2008

The government decided yesterday to launch a full-scale effort to reorganize the Ministry of Defense (MOD), due to the series of unfortunate incidents in the Defense Ministry and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), including the recent collision between the Maritime Self-Defense Force Aegis destroyer Atago and a fishing boat. The government's Council on Reform of the Defense Ministry, chaired by Tokyo Electric Power Co. adviser Nobuya Minami, is planning to produce a reform plan as early as June, based on Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba's private proposal to integrate and reorganize the civilian personnel from internal bureaus and uniformed personnel from the Self-Defense Forces' staff offices. Discussions are expected to be difficult since many officials in the ministry oppose the envisaged reform.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda attended yesterday the panel's meeting for the first time since the Atago accident. He told the members: "An extremely regrettable accident has occurred. Based on the lessons we have learned, I would like you to come up with a plan to transform MOD and SDF into organizations worthy of public trust."

The council's discussions have been focused on three points: (1) ensuring transparency in defense equipment procurement, (2) establishing a strict information security system, and (3) ensuring civilian control.

As the next step, the panel is set to study specific ways to drastically reorganize the ministry.

Specifically, the panel is expected to discuss Defense Minister Ishiba's plan to integrate and reorganize the ministry's internal bureaus and the SDF staff offices into three sections, each responsible for: building up defense capabilities, employment, and Diet affairs and public relations.

Under this system, civilian personnel and uniformed personnel, who are currently placed in different sections, would work together to make the decision-making process more flexible. It is also aimed at encouraging civilian personnel and uniformed personnel to overcome a history of mutual distrust to run MOD and SDF more effectively.

(3) France an ordinary country, Japan abnormal

SANKEI (Page 5) (Abridged)  
February 29, 2008

Hiroyuki Noguchi

A Maritime Self-Defense Force supply vessel resumed its refueling mission in the Indian Ocean after a hiatus of four months for

foreign naval vessels engaged in antiterror operations. During the MSDF's absence, France was amazing with its presence in the Middle East and in the Indian Ocean. The French military conducted antiterror activities in the Indian Ocean and made four aircraft carrier dispatches. In Afghanistan, France has deployed 1,000 ground troops, with its air force airlifting troops. France was opposed to the Iraq attack. Even so, its international influence has been increasing. This is in sharp contrast to Japan, which chose to cut

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off its influence and lost four months on its own. The Self-Defense Forces is not expeditionary like France's armed services, which have flattops and marines. However, the SDF and the French military are almost on the same scale. This is the striking contrast between an "ordinary country" that pursues national interests, with its diplomacy and military as one, and an "abnormal country" that refused to do so.

France outwardly opposed the U.S.-led military attack on Iraq from its stance of attaching importance to the United Nations. However, that was reportedly intended to defend its energy stake in Iraq. The Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) also raised an objection to sending an MSDF squadron to the Indian Ocean without a U.N. resolution as unconstitutional. However, that was a political tactic to allow the party to take over political power. It is only natural that a country should act on behalf of its national interests. As far as diplomacy and security are concerned, however, a political party should not act for its own self interests.

Even the French government, which opposed the Iraq attack, says the MSDF's refueling mission is fully in line with the U.N. Charter, which the Constitution of Japan honors. The U.N. World Food Program (WFP) continues its food aid to Somalia, a country facing the Indian Ocean. In November last year, the French navy went on a patrol mission to defend WFP support ships against pirates. In Indian Ocean waters off Somalia, there were 22 pirate attacks from early last year through this point, including two attacks on WFP support ships. Somalia neighbors Djibouti, which was a French territory. Currently, the French army and air force contribute in part to the defense of Djibouti. France carried through its stance of attaching importance to the United Nations even though its troop deployment was intended to protect its interests.

An "ordinary country" can participate in collective self-defense. In January, French President Sarkozy signed an agreement to set up bases in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the French army, navy, and air force to station up to 5,000 troops. This is the first time for France to station troops in a Persian Gulf state, where the French military will keep tabs on the Straits of Hormuz, which is a strategic point for crude oil shipping. In other words, France has now influence on the oil market.

It is not difficult for an ordinary country to send troops. That is because an ordinary country's military law for ordinary times-which incorporates the purpose of using its armed forces-can cover a considerable portion of its military operations. Meanwhile, an abnormal country establishes a special measures law for each situation. An ordinary country-unlike an abnormal country-is ready for potential situations. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party is now discussing a permanent law allowing Japan to send SDF troops for overseas activities whenever necessary. A permanent law, once established, would quicken Japan's overseas troop deployment as compared with taking much time to enact a special measures law. Under a special measures law, however, SDF activities are interpreted as administrative affairs, differing from military operations that are prescribed in a military law. This is why Japan needs a permanent law. Such a permanent law also shows that Japan is an abnormal country.

(4) U.S. military relaxes lockdown; Local heads, civic groups criticize reflection as mere pose; Set to pursue step in prefectural rally

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Despite a flurry of incidents by U.S. service members, the U.S. military on March 3 significantly relaxed the base lockdown, unilaterally releasing a notice that ended its "period of reflection." The step has drawn strong objections from local heads and civic groups, saying, "As expected, the reflection was only a mere pose," and, "If another incident occurs, how is (the U.S. military) going to take responsibility?"

Chatan Mayor Masaharu Noguni harshly criticized the decision, saying:

"The lockdown was a kind of performance by the U.S. military. Due to organizational slackness, guidance on the series of incidents has not reached the lower-ranking soldiers. Given the absence of a sense of repentance, we cannot understand the relaxation."

The Okinawa City Assembly will hold a Base Affairs Ad-Hoc Committee meeting on March 5 to discuss its response to the recent trespassing in a private building by a U.S. airman. Committee Chairperson Katsue Yonamine said in disgust:

"I wonder how the U.S. military is taking the fact that misconduct occurred despite the ban on leaving the bases. Why do they have to loosen up the measure, when it is not even now working properly?"

Haruko Odo, who heads a federation of women's groups in the prefecture, commented angrily:

"Once a curfew is imposed, it must be kept in place for three months in order to produce results. 'Reflection' did not have any substance. (The U.S. military) has always been like that for over 60 years after the end of WWII. We will pursue the matter at the upcoming prefectural rally."

Okinawa Heiwa Undou Center Secretary General Hiroji Yamashiro took this view:

"They made the decision at the wrong time. How are they going to take responsibility if another incident occurs after the ban is eased? All we can do is to heighten public opinion by protesting (incidents involving U.S. military personnel)."

Prefecture Peace Committee Secretary General Hiroyasu Okubo also criticized the step, saying:

"As long as there are bases, crimes will definitely occur. The lockdown was only a pose, a makeshift period of reflection. To stop taking even that pose is defiant."

Meanwhile, a 33-year-old American running a restaurant in Chatan welcomed the decision, noting: "It was natural to remove the family members and civilian employees from the ban."

(5) Political battle over provisional gas tax rate: LDP impatiently making frantic effort for early start of Diet deliberations; DPJ remain bullish with Ozawa's policy change reflected in party atmosphere

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Following the passage of the fiscal 2008 budget bill and the bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law, including the maintaining of the provisional rates on such taxes as the gasoline tax, by the Lower House, a full-fledged political battle between the ruling and opposition parties kicked off in the Upper House on March 3. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) is stiffening its stance, saying that it cannot respond to a call for participating in Upper House deliberations on the budget bill, because the ruling camp rammed those bills through the Lower House. The ruling parties,

which see securing Diet approval for the bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law as a duty that takes top priority, are increasingly becoming impatient.

Diet Policy Committee Chairman Seiji Suzuki Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) stressed during a press conference on Mar. 3: "We are calling on the DPJ to take part in Diet deliberations as soon as possible. We want it to quickly present a deliberation schedule so that we can confer on that."

The ruling parties on Mar. 3 made frantic efforts for an early start of deliberations on the budget bill and the bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law. As part of such efforts, LDP Diet Policy Committee Chairmen Seiji Suzuki and New Komeito Diet Policy Committee Chairman Hisashi Kazama of the Upper House on the evening of the 3rd visited the Upper House speaker, deputy speaker, the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in an effort to strengthen pressure on the DPJ so that it will soften its stance.

In the meantime, Upper House Budget Committee Chairman Yoshitada Konoike adopted by virtue of his office a schedule for holding deliberations on the 4th with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and all cabinet ministers in attendance.

He fixed a deliberation schedule, while knowing that it would be impossible to hold deliberations in the Upper House with the number of participants falling short of the quorum if the opposition parties boycott them. However, he expects that if the DPJ's absence is highlighted, public criticism of the DPJ would mount, and the DPJ as a result would soften its stance.

However, there is a slim chance of the DPJ responding to a call for taking part in Diet deliberations at an early date.

DPJ Diet Affairs Committee Chair Susumu Yanase on the afternoon of the 3rd triumphantly said, when Suzuki notified his party of the committee's decision to hold by virtue of his office an Upper House Budget Committee meeting: "We have no intention whatsoever of attending deliberations. If we did, it would worsen the situation."

Senior DPJ members, including President Ichiro Ozawa, on the afternoon of the 3rd vowed to continue the stance of not responding to a call for taking part in Upper House deliberations, citing that the relationship of trust between the ruling and opposition parties has collapsed with the ruling camp forcing bills, including the budget bill, through the Lower House.

The ruling parties are calling for holding talks to revise the bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law. The DPJ is determined not to

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respond to their call, unless the LDP comes up with a revision plan, a senior Diet Affairs Committee member said. It is also determined not to agree to set up a consultative organ. Even if it took part in Upper House deliberations, it wants to prioritize deliberations on its own counterproposals.

The strategy of attaining cuts in gasoline prices by letting the provisional tax rate expire at the end of March, thereby forcing the Fukuda cabinet to dissolve the Lower House for a snap election, is also regaining ground in the DPJ.

Behind a hard-line stance like this is Ozawa's clear confrontational stance. He noted: "The current LDP-New Komeito administration and the Fukuda cabinet are unsteady. It would be better to hold a general election for the sake of the public."

A change in the stance of Ozawa -- whom party members had suspected since the grand coalition hurly-burly last fall that he might join hands with the prime minister -- is apparently reflected in the hard-line stand.

(6) Editorial: Quickly work out measures to protect cultural assets from earthquakes

A strong earthquake in Kyoto and Nara may collapse or burn many of the temples that are designated as national treasures or key cultural assets, including world's cultural assets.

The government's Central Disaster Prevention Council has produced its first report on possible damage to be caused by a major earthquake to cultural assets. It was a shocking report on earthquake prediction. In actuality, however, for most of such buildings, satisfactory measures against an earthquake or a fire have not been taken. It is our responsibility to protect historic cultural assets for the sake of future generations. Measures must be urgently hammered out.

The report focuses on whether a quake registering a strong 6 or over on the Japanese seismic scale could occur in a zone of active faulting in the Kinki or Chubu metropolitan district and on where the flames would spread.

There are about 260 buildings designated as national treasures or important cultural assets houses in the zone of the Hanaore Fault running from Shiga Prefecture through Kyoto Prefecture, mainly in Kyoto. Of the 17 temples and castles as the world's cultural heritage in Kyoto, Kiyomizu Temple, Toji and other 11 assets are located within this region.

An earthquake in the zone of the Ikoma Fault in eastern Osaka is estimated to affect a region that houses about 220 national treasures or important cultural assets, including Horyu-ji and Todai-ji.

A major quake will inevitably deal a serious blow to cultural assets. Even so, quake-proof measures have been taken only for 20-some cultural assets in the zones mentioned above in recent years.

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Since 2005, the Agency for Cultural Affairs has provided subsidies for earthquake inspections of the buildings to which a number of tourists visit. The inspections found a high possibility that Nijo-jo may collapse in a great earthquake.

In Kyoto, only seven cultural assets underwent an earthquake inspection with the agency's subsidies. The owners should hurriedly have their assets inspected and make them resistant to earthquakes.

SCHIEFFER